

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 452

CG 013 399

AUTHOR Alpert, Judith L.; And Others
 TITLE Onset of Parenting and Stressful Events.
 PUB DATE [78]
 NOTE 24p.
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Child Rearing; *Family Life; Fathers; Mother Attitudes; *Parent Attitudes; Parents; Research Projects; *Sex Differences; *Stress Variables; *Working Parents

ABSTRACT

A list of stressful events associated with onset of parenting is developed. The events and established weights are ranked to reflect the degree of disruption that would be caused should that event occur. Whether the rankings and weightings differ as a function of parent sex and maternal work status is also considered. The means for developing the list and the rankings and weightings are presented. Results indicate high internal consistency in weightings (.81 to .92) and significant differences in ranking among the four groups of parents (nonworking mothers, working mothers, fathers with nonworking wives, fathers with working wives) on two of the 21 events. Implications for parent education programs and research are discussed. (Author)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

Onset of Parenting and Stressful Events

Judith L. Alpert

Mary Sue Richardson

Linda Fodaski

New York University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J.L. Alpert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND
USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM"

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Running head: Onset of

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to develop a list of stressful events associated with onset of parenting, and to rank the events and establish weights in a way which reflects the degree of disruption that would be caused should that event occur. Whether the rankings and weightings differ as a function of parent sex and maternal work status was considered also. The means for developing the list and the rankings and weightings are presented. Results indicate high internal consistency in weightings (.81 to .92) and significant differences in ranking between the four groups of parents (nonworking mothers, working mothers, fathers with nonworking wives, fathers with working wives) on two of the 21 events. Implications for parent education programs and research are discussed.

Onset of Parenting and Stressful Events

The birth of the first child has been conceptualized as a crisis or critical event for parents (LeMasters, 1957), and the work of several investigators focusing on the effects of the first child on family roles and relationship support this conceptualization (Dyer, 1967; Hill, 1949). Further support for the difficulty in assuming and occupying the parent role is indicated by numerous studies concerned with women and depression. In general, this research indicates that married women with young children living at home show more symptomatology relevant to depression and anxiety than men or other women (Mazer, 1976; Radloff, 1975; Seiden, 1976). Further, research focusing on well-being rather than mental illness yields similar findings concerning the effects of parenting (Birnbaum, 1975). It is clear that parenting is stressful. Further, it is clear that parenting is conceptualized as a stressful event rather than a series of stressful events. It is not clear, however, which events associated with the onset of parenting are stressful. Further, it is not clear whether the stressful events associated with the onset of parenting differ as a function of parental sex and maternal work status.

The purpose of the present study, which is based on the literature of stressful life events, is to develop a list of stressful life events associated with onset of parenting and to rank the events and establish weights in a way which reflects the degree of disruption that would be caused should that event occur. Also to be considered is whether there is

agreement within and between the following four groups: non-working mothers with working husbands (Mo-NW), working mothers with working husbands (Mo-W), working fathers with non-working wives (Fa-NWW) and working fathers with working wives (Fa-WW). For purposes of this study, a mother will be considered a working mother if she had worked at least three days a week during most of the first year of her child's life. Note that the term "nonworking" refers to the mother's or wife's outside of home employment only.

Method

Procedure and Research Participants

The development of the list is consistent with the development of other instruments measuring life stress (Cochrane & Robertson, 1972; Holmes & Rahe, 1967) and takes into account concerns regarding this methodology (Hough, Fairbank & Garcia, 1976). Specifically, the attempt was to make the list of events unambiguous and relatively complete, so that a wide range of life events associated with onset of parenting is included. Second, the attempt was to use a mode of administration which is relatively error free. The slips method was utilized which involves giving respondents slips of paper with each slip having a different event written on it. This mode was utilized since it was judged more error-free (Hough, Fairbank & Garcia, 1976). Third, the attempt was to make the list of events and the ranking and rating meaningful to various groups. Usually in life stress research weights are expressed in life change units

and an event is selected and assigned an arbitrary weight by the investigator, in order to establish a common frame of reference. However, in light of the criticism of the use of an anchor point (Hough, et al., 1976) and the assignment of different scale values to this event by different ethnic groups, respondents in the present study, as in the studies of Kiyak, Liang & Kahana (Note 1) and Paykel, Prusoff, Brigitte & Uhlerhuth (1971), were not required to compare the readjustment value of an event relative to an anchor stimulus. Rather, respondents were asked to rank and rate the events as will be described more fully below. Fourth, criticism raised by Hough et al. and Mechanic (1975) concerns the lack of distinction between positive and negative life changes. Since several investigators hold that the readjustment required by an event rather than its desirability per se makes the events stressful (Dohrenwend, 1973; Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Miller, Bentz & Brogan, 1977; Seyle, 1975), there was no attempt in the present study to distinguish between positive and negative life events.

In the present study, the two phases in scale development were : (a) development of items for the scale and (b) ranking and rating the stressful events, according to the degree of stress associated with each event. These two phases are described more fully below.

Development of items. Nondirective interviews were conducted in the first phase for purposes of developing items for the scale. Respondents in the first phase were composed of individuals the graduate student interviewer or other interviewees knew. All who were asked agreed to participate

in the interviews, and all interviewees are college graduates. Specifically, in the first phase respondents consist of 35 parents who have one or more children under age five. There are ten nonworking mothers (Mo-NW), 14 working mothers (Mo-W), 5 fathers with nonworking wives (Fa-NWW), and 6 fathers with working wives (Fa-WW). The modal number of children for nonworking mothers is two, while the modal number for the other three groups is one. In Table 1, the percent and number of research participants for each phase by group is presented.

Insert Table 1 about here

The events were derived from nondirective interviews with 35 parents. The interviews were conducted in person and by telephone by an advanced graduate student, and the duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. Specifically, respondents were asked what was stressful for them in parenting. Stressful events were defined as those events which produced anxiety. When the interviewee responded with dramatic events only, such as critical illness, the interviewer indicated that daily events could also be stressful.

Each event was recorded on a card. Code numbers identified the interviewee associated with each event. The events were then sorted into 26 categories. From the 21 categories which included an event listed by a minimum of 10 respondents, a stressful event was derived. For example,

some residents indicated that their in-laws were intrusive while others indicated that their in-laws were not helpful. These two types of responses were categorized under "in-laws". From this category, which included events from 10 respondents, the stressful event "interference from in-laws related to child" was derived. Since there were 21 categories which included events from at least 10 respondents, a total of 21 stressful events were derived. The six categories which included an event listed by less than 10 respondents were not used to develop the list of stressful events.

Ranking and rating of stressful events. In the second phase of instrument development parents ranked and rated the 21 stressful events, according to the amount of change the event would produce in an adult's usual way of life. Respondents in this phase were volunteers who have at least one child attending one of three New York City nursery schools. A total of 120 parents agreed to participate. However, only 63 (52%) of the sample actually participated. All are college graduates. Specifically, the respondents in this phase consist of 63 parents who have one or more children under age five. All fathers were working and all mothers had working husbands. There are 24 nonworking mothers, 16 working mothers, 15 fathers with nonworking wives, and 8 fathers with working wives. The modal number of children for working mothers is one, while the modal number for the other three groups is two.

Each of the 21 stressful events associated with onset of parenting was placed on an index card and the cards were given to 63 parents for purposes of ranking the stressful events according to the amount of change the event would produce in an adult's usual way of life. Respondents were asked to order the cards from most to least change. Following, they were asked to write a number from 1 (no change) to 100 (total change) for each event according to the amount of change the event would produce in an individual's way of life. Next they were instructed to check those events they had experienced since pregnancy and to complete a demographic questionnaire.

In general this phase was completed at home by respondents, and took each respondent approximately 20 minutes. Respondents were instructed not to discuss the questionnaire with others who might be completing the questionnaire in the future.

Results

The list of 21 stressful events associated with onset of parenting is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The mean weightings and standard deviations for each event by group and total sample is presented in Table 3. The relatively large variability is noted here. Also, the distribution for each event indicates

that the responses are not normally distributed. Therefore, group differences are not considered by means of F tests.

Insert Table 3 about here

A reliability analysis for the scale was also done. Specifically, intraclass correlations were computed in order to determine if there is agreement in ratings within each of the four groups. The coefficients range from .81 to .92, and indicate high internal consistency, as Table 4 indicates.

Insert Table 4 about here

In Table 5, mean rankings and range for each event by group and total sample is presented. Table 5 indicated those events with the two highest mean total rankings indicating low stress are Q, learning to hold child ($\bar{X} = 17.93$, Range = 21-6); and P, learning to bathe child ($\bar{X} = 17.64$, Range = 20-3). Those two events with lowest mean total rankings indicating high stress are L, major illness of child ($\bar{X} = 3.80$, Range = 20-1); and G, frequent conflictual demands for time by spouse and child ($\bar{X} = 3.20$, Range = 19-1). The next two lowest mean rankings are I, frequent conflictual demands between needs for self and child ($\bar{X} = 7.25$, Range = 18-1) and H, loss of sleep during first three months after child's birth ($\bar{X} = 8.50$, Range = 20-1).

Insert Table 5 about here

Next, group differences in rankings were analyzed by means of Kruskal-Wallis One-way Analysis of Variance By Ranks, as Table 6 indicates. Since the data for each event is not normally distributed, this nonparametric analysis was done. Specifically, the analysis was done in order to determine if there is a significant difference in rankings among the groups. The analysis indicates a significant difference between groups for event I (frequent conflictual demands between needs for self and child) ~~and K (frequent minor illnesses of child)~~.

Insert Table 6 about here

The data in Tables 5 and 6 together indicate that of the four groups, non-working mothers and fathers with working wives ranked event I (frequent demands between needs for self and child) highest and lowest respectively. In the degree of change the event would produce, fathers with working wives and working mothers ranked event K (frequent minor illnesses of child) highest and lowest respectively in the degree of change the event would produce.

Discussion

From the present study, what has been derived is a list of 21 stressful events associated with onset of parenting and a ranking and weighting of the events which reflect the degree of disruption that would be caused should that event occur. The data indicate that the two events which would

produce the least change in an individual's way of life are learning to hold the child and learning to bathe the child while the two events which would produce the most change are major illness of child and frequent conflictual demands for time by spouse and child. Also producing relatively high change are frequent conflictual demands between needs for self and child and loss of sleep during first three months after birth. Further, the data indicate relative agreement within each of the four groups and between the groups. For two of the 21 events, differences between groups were noted. Of the four groups, nonworking mothers and fathers with working wives ranked "frequent demands between needs for self and child" highest and lowest respectively in the degree of change the event would produce, and fathers with working wives and working mothers ranked "frequent minor illnesses of child" highest and lowest respectively in the degree of change the event would produce. These differences between groups will be discussed first. Following, the implications of the relative agreement in rankings will be considered.

The most surprising finding of the study is that on those events where there are differences between groups, it is some group other than working mothers who rank the event higher in the degree of change the event would produce. It is commonly believed that the group which experiences the most stress is the woman who combines roles. The results of this study support Stewart's findings (Note 2), which indicate that role combination per se does not lead to generally high stress. It appears that frequent conflictual demands between need for self and child (event I) is experienced as

most stressful by nonworking mothers, in comparison to the other groups. Thus it seems that the effects of this stress are experienced as greater for the traditional mother, the mother who spends most time with child. The other groups of parents may feel less stress because these conflictual demands are less frequent, given the lower frequency with the child, and less intense, given the working parents' satisfaction of some self needs through employment. It appears that event I is experienced as less stressful by fathers with working wives. It may be that there is more sharing of the responsibilities and demands for the child by dual-working parents. Why the fathers with working wives seem to experience most stress around "frequent minor illnesses of child" (event K), consistent with the latter interpretation, Fathers of working wives may assume more responsibility for child care. They may experience role conflict, and care for sick child rather than work. Why working mothers seem to experience event K as least stressful than the other groups is more perplexing.

The most significant finding of the study is the relative agreement between groups. The study has resulted in a list of stressful events associated with parenting and the ordering of events is comparable for groups of parents. The list could have implications for the development of parent education programs. Specifically, what could be considered in such programs are those events which reflect a high degree of disruption. Further, given the relatively high intra-group and inter-group agreement,

the list could be used to further research on parenting. For example, such a list could further the study of factors related to adaptation to parenthood in general, and the relationship between the quality of resolution of stressful life events associated with onset of parenting and the ability to predict and to control those events in particular.

Reference Notes

1. Kiyak, A., Liang, J. & Kahana, E. A methodological inquiry into the schedule of recent life events. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, September, 1976.
2. Stewart, A. Role combination and psychological health in women. Paper presented at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, March, 1978.

References

- Birnbaum, J. A. Life patterns and self-esteem in gifted family-oriented and career-committed women. In M. T. S. Mednick, S. S. Tangri, & L. W. Hoffman (Eds.), Women and achievement: Social and motivational analyses. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975.
- Cochrane, R., & Robertson, A. The life events inventory: A measure of the relative severity of psycho-social stresses. Journal of Psycho-Somatic Research, 1973, 17, 135-130.
- Dohrenwend, B. Life events as stressors: A methodological inquiry. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1973, 14, 167-175.
- Dyer, E. D. Parenthood as crisis: A restudy. Marriage and Family Living, 1963, 25, 196-201.
- Hill, R. Families under stress. New York: Harper & Row, 1949.
- Holmes, R. L., & Rahe, R. M. The social readjustment scale. Journal of Psycho-Somatic Research, 1967, 11, 213-223.
- Hough, R. L., Fairbank, D. T., & Garcia, A. M. Problems in the ratio measurement of life stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1976, 17, 70-82.
- LeMasters, E. E. Parenthood as crisis. Journal of Marriage and Family Living, 1957, 19, 352-355.
- Mazer, M. People and predicaments. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Mechanic, D. Some problems in the measurement of stress and social readjustment. Journal of Human Stress, 1975, 43-47.

- Miller, F. T., Bentz, W. K., Aponte, J. F., & Brogan, D. R. Perception of life crisis events: A comparative study of rural and urban samples. In B. Dohrenwend & B. P. Dohrenwend (Eds.), Stressful life events: Their nature and effects. New York: Wiley & Sons, 1974.
- Paykel, E. S., Prusoff, B. A., & Uhlerhuth, E. H. Scaling of life events. Archives of General Psychiatry, 1971, 25, 340.
- Seiden, A. M. Overview: Research on the psychology of women. II, women in families, work, and psychotherapy. The American Journal of Psychiatry, 1976, 133(10), 1111-1121.
- Seyle, H. The stress of life. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956.
- Radloff, L. Sex differences in depression: The effects of occupation and marital status. Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 1975, 1, 249.

Footnote

Judith L. Alpert and Mary Sue Richardson are senior authors. Based on a paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, August, 1978. The authors gratefully acknowledge the statistical consultation from Sharon Weinberg and computer assistance from Amy Glass. Requests for reprints should be sent to Judith Landon Alpert, School Psychology Program, Department of Educational Psychology, New York University, 926 Shimkin Hall, New York, New York 10003.

Table 1
Percent and Number of Research Participants
for Each Phase by Group

Group	Phase			
	I		II	
	Percent	N	Percent	N
Mo-NW	29	10	38	24
Mo-W	40	14	25	16
Fa-NWW	14	5	24	15
Fa-WW	17	6	13	8
Total	100	35	100	63

Table 2

List of Stressful Events Associated with Onset of Parenting

-
- A. Pregnancy
 - B. Difficult childbirth
 - C. Physical complications within one month after childbirth and related to childbirth (e.g., excessive bleeding, infections, etc.)
 - D. Colic
 - E. Feeding problems
 - F. Mate and self determining division of responsibility around child
 - G. Frequent conflictual demands for time by spouse and child
 - H. Loss of sleep during first three months after child's birth
 - I. Frequent conflictual demands between needs for self and child
 - J. First illness of child
 - K. Frequent minor illnesses of child
 - L. Major illness of child (surgery or hospitalization required)
 - M. Interferences from in-laws related to child
 - N. Reallocation of financial resources due to child
 - O. Irregularity in child's feeding and sleeping schedule after first three months
 - P. Learning to bathe child
 - Q. Learning to hold child
 - R. Learning how to control child's crying
 - S. Determining coordination and management of daily routines
 - T. Leaving child with caretaker during first three months
 - U. Leaving child with caretaker after first three months
-

Table 3

Mean Weightings and Standard Deviations for Each Event by Group and Total

Event	Groups									
	Mo-NW (N = 24)		Mo-W (N = 16)		Fa-NWW (N = 15)		Fa-WW (N = 8)		Total (N = 63)	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
A	40.37	34.19	28.19	29.05	39.73	39.75	22.00	29.77	35.93	33.78
B	25.14	23.78	33.50	30.66	46.47	38.49	34.00	36.85	34.68	31.52
C	35.04	34.37	38.94	28.19	44.79	37.01	36.38	34.57	40.47	32.52
D	42.08	30.99	46.81	31.44	32.47	38.20	47.75	37.45	43.80	32.85
E	34.38	28.32	37.56	26.24	31.07	25.21	30.88	27.26	34.50	24.72
F	55.92	30.28	50.00	29.34	42.07	33.69	30.25	25.72	47.82	30.91
G	58.54	29.43	50.94	27.22	48.20	38.19	40.37	30.60	51.84	31.20
H	59.54	33.24	51.88	26.76	35.20	31.88	52.50	34.44	50.91	31.18
I	70.08	29.81	49.38	27.62	52.20	31.64	34.75	23.81	56.08	30.89
J	42.09	27.77	40.31	30.23	35.14	20.06	46.00	39.03	40.52	20.07
K	43.83	25.01	36.25	25.46	49.27	27.75	54.63	34.43	44.57	27.08
L	76.25	28.18	80.71	24.95	72.07	31.28	82.50	18.52	78.35	25.12
M	41.54	30.58	21.69	15.39	22.27	28.10	13.88	10.43	29.33	26.57
N	32.63	21.61	36.81	35.73	35.40	33.35	41.62	35.04	36.06	29.56
O	48.78	29.42	41.88	22.48	41.13	29.10	26.14	25.79	42.49	27.47
P	10.71	16.98	11.12	15.32	10.13	16.82	13.75	26.92	11.81	17.97
Q	11.00	18.41	9.19	13.40	9.67	15.09	13.13	27.12	11.20	17.84
R	36.87	27.79	37.33	30.58	28.67	30.67	42.75	34.71	36.90	29.45
S	46.38	31.15	44.00	26.98	39.60	31.75	32.75	31.35	42.42	29.92
T	36.22	30.15	48.19	35.96	26.27	29.91	29.75	54.46	36.66	32.53
U	28.21	23.33	49.44	35.54	25.07	25.86	31.25	32.14	33.24	29.19

Note. The higher the mean, the greater the change the event would produce.

Table 4
 Reliability Analysis: Intraclass Correlations
 Across 21 Events by Groups and Total

	Groups				
	Mo-NW	Mo-W	Fa-NWW	FA-WW	Total
	(N = 16)	(N = 16)	(N = 15)	(N = 8)	(N = 63)
Reliability coefficient (over 21 items)	.81	.88	.82	.92	.85
Standardized item	.81	.90	.81	.92	.86

Table 5

Mean Rankings and Range for Each Event by Group and Total

Events	Groups								
	Mo-NW (N = 24)		Mo-W (N = 16)		Fa-NWW (N = 15)		Fa-WW (N = 8)		Total (N = 63)
	$\bar{X}$	Range	$\bar{X}$	Range	$\bar{X}$	Range	$\bar{X}$	Range	$\bar{X}$
A	12.10	20-1	13.32	20-3	11.80	20-2	14.69	20-5	12.77
B	14.33	20-4	11.78	20-2	9.93	19-1	12.25	20-2	12.38
C	12.81	20-2	10.53	19-2	9.43	20-2	10.50	20-1	11.13
D	11.38	20-1	9.62	21-2	12.73	20-3	8.13	20-1	10.84
E	11.81	19-4	11.41	19-4	11.87	20-1	10.50	16-5	11.56
F	8.08	19-1	8.66	19-1	9.37	17-2	11.81	21-2	9.01
G	7.21	17-2	8.84	19-1	8.17	18-1	9.88	14-2	3.20
H	7.00	19-2	8.41	20-1	11.23	19-3	8.00	14-1	8.50
I	5.10	16-1	8.69	18-1	7.13	18-1	11.00	18-4	7.25
J	10.44	19-1	11.09	19-1	9.97	17-3	8.31	18-2	10.22
K	10.25	20-2	11.41	20-3	7.60	18-2	5.37	10-2	9.30
L	4.48	20-1	3.00	10-1	4.60	19-1	1.88	6-1	3.80
M	11.35	20-2	14.78	21-7	13.80	21-2	15.25	19-7	13.30
N	12.17	21-3	11.81	20-1	11.87	18-2	10.13	19-2	11.75
O	9.42	18-2	10.69	19-2	9.73	17-2	12.88	17-10	10.25
P	18.33	20-10	17.88	20-12	16.50	20-3	17.25	20-11	17.64
Q	18.48	21-12	18.50	21-13	16.77	21-6	17.31	21-11	17.93
R	11.73	20-4	11.91	19-5	12.17	20-2	9.56	20-2	11.60
S	9.94	20-2	9.88	17-2	10.17	18-3	12.69	17-5	10.33
T	11.42	20-2	9.34	19-2	13.07	21-3	12.63	20-3	11.44
U	13.17	20-3	9.06	19-1	13.10	20-3	11.00	19-4	11.84

Note. The higher the rank, the lower the change the event would produce.

Table 6

Kruskall-Wallis One-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks:

Influence of Groups on Rankings Across Events

Event	χ^2
A	1.37
B	4.98
C	3.20
D	3.78
E	0.74
F	2.90
G	2.68
H	6.82
I	11.42*
J	1.66
K	11.53*
L	3.51
M	5.48
N	0.91
O	5.07
P	2.34
Q	1.19
R	1.55
S	2.57
T	3.73
U	5.06

* $p < .01$